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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-TAIWAN RELATIONS, THE UN REFERENDA

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused news coverage March 12 on KMT's expected announcement on how it will handle two UN referenda held along with the presidential election; on the presidential election campaigns; and on New York Governor Eliot Spitzer's sex scandal. In terms of editorials and commentaries, Mark Stokes, a former U.S. Department of Defense official, in the pro-independence English-language "Taipei Times" shared his reflections on the recently released U.S. Department of Defense report on the PRC's military. Stokes not only reminded Taiwan not to divert attention from other security challenges, but also provide some prospects on the U.S.-Taiwan bilateral defense relationship. A commentary in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" criticized the KMT's attempt to boycott the UN referenda and the U.S.'s alleged suppression of Taiwan's participation in the international community. End summary.

¶2. U.S.-Taiwan Relations

"Taiwan Must Review Security Risks"

Mark Stokes, a former official at the U.S. Department of Defense and currently the executive director of The Project 2049 Institute and a member of the Taiwan Policy Working Group, opined in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (3/12):

"... the growing PRC military threat suggests that further adjustments may be necessary to the US-Taiwan defense relationship, in accordance with the Taiwan Relations Act.

"Abrogation of the US-Republic of China Mutual Defense Treaty and withdrawal of the US military presence on the island were premised upon China's commitment to a peaceful approach to resolving differences with Taiwan.

"The most visible demonstration of a peaceful commitment is its force posture. Therefore, as the threat to the people of Taiwan and their democratically elected leadership grows, so should the depth and breadth of US defense and security relations with Taiwan. A congressionally mandated policy review group should assess and recommend a range of new initiatives that could further assist Taiwan in its self-defense and enhance the ability of the US military, should it be called upon to do so, to operate with Taiwan's defense establishment as ad hoc coalition partners.

"In addition, if Taiwan's formal requests for defense articles and services are not being given proper attention, resurrecting the annual Arms Sales Talks may be justified.

"Finally, in order to remain aware of other important security needs, and in accordance with the Taiwan Relations Act, congressionally mandated reporting on Taiwan's economic security is worth considering."

13. The UN Referenda

"Refusing to Collect the Referenda Ballots is Against the Principle of Honesty"

Lee Wen-chung, a former DPP legislator, opined in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 520,000] (3/12):

"The controversy over the DPP's UN referendum and the KMT's UN referendum has been unceasing. Many people reckon that the passage of the referenda does not help [Taiwan] to enter the United Nations and will instead seriously harm U.S.-Taiwan relations and cross-Strait relations. The failure of the referenda will send wrong signals to the international community, which will result in enormous harm [to Taiwan]. These arguments have their reasons. However, when it is unlikely that the referenda and the presidential election can be separated, and the controversy with other compromised plans cannot be solved because of time constraints and legitimate procedures, some people in the Blue camp once again advocate refusing to collect the referenda ballots, which we sternly oppose.

"First, the Asia-Pacific order which the U.S. predominates is to maintain the stability across the Taiwan Strait by keeping the status quo of 'Taiwan' independent sovereignty and suppress our space in participating in the international community.

"This is definitely unfair to Taiwan! It has significant meaning when people voice discontent to the international community and demand that Taiwan have an appropriate international personality via the passage of a referendum. Second, the purpose of two presidents in the past to come up with "a special state-to-state relationship" [Lee Teng-hui] and "one state on each side" [Chen Shui-bian] was to echo people's voices at a certain level. These claims obviously do not coincide with the U.S. and China's interests. Pressure is put

on our administration directly. Once a referendum passes, sympathy will arise extensively in the U.S., Japan and Europe. Beijing will have scruples as well. All this will provide a new leader [in Taiwan] with more strategic room to maneuver when striving for international status. Third, Taiwan internally has divergent grounds on issues such as unification and independence, ethnicity, and cross-Strait relations. Joining the UN is one rare issue that has a high consensus among people. Therefore, promoting the issue has a significant function of integrating internal consensus.

"If the KMT once again advocates refusing to collect the referenda ballots, the direct effect will be the failure of the referenda for not passing the threshold. The serious harm to Taiwan is as described above. ..."

YOUNG